

NSC BRIEFING

17 May 1955

*Lead*

**EUROPEAN REACTIONS**

- I. Reactions of most Western European countries to new Soviet proposals, while mixed, are characterized mainly by a strong desire to explore these and subsequent proposals further.
- A. Although suspicion of Soviet intentions remains, all countries would like to reconcile security considerations with reduction in the burden of armaments and avoidance of too great a rebirth of German power.
- II. UK officials and press have interpreted maneuvers as obvious steps toward establishment of a "neutral belt"--including, above all, Germany.
- A. Because of general election (26 May), UK government has been unwilling to consider more than timing and procedures on "summit" talks.
- B. UK officials know that public opinion holds great expectations for such a meeting, are especially anxious to appear optimistic.
- III. Britain's dilemma lies in balancing "strength" (which British agree has permitted West to extract "concessions" from Soviet) against the degree of "conciliation" which public opinion now appears to demand.

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- A. UK officials, aware that ultimate Soviet objective is withdrawal of US from overseas bases, emphasize that NATO (as base of Western strength) must not be impaired and that British and American troops on the north German plain are vital to success of NATO's forward strategy.
  - B. However, UK officials expect USSR to make an offer which will amount to reunification of neutral Germany: further believe that USSR may accept Eden plan for free all-German elections, and that West must offer something more than at Berlin last year.
  - C. There are indications that UK may be thinking in terms of East-West agreement to limit arms, and of some constriction in Western military posture in Europe in return for USSR withdrawal toward its own frontiers.
    - 1. Two responsible press sources have already suggested that the only acceptable price for any Western withdrawal would be freedom for Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe.
- IV. French view of situation is generally optimistic: concerned primarily with latest Soviet disarmament proposals, French believe some European security system may be possible even if German problem left UN solved.
- A. Have come to see ratification of Paris agreements as end in itself, rather than start for fresh development Western strength.

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- B. Since Austrian treaty, French officials hold that Western "position of strength" has been achieved diplomatically, is beginning to pay off in prospects or more successful East-West negotiations.
- C. French believe USSR will not require abandonment of WEU and NATO as price of a detente, partly because Kremlin wishes to retain its hold on East Germany.
  - 1. French therefore playing with idea that European power balance, achieved by recent creation Warsaw group, would permit serious negotiations for the limitation of armaments along the lines provided by WEU.
- V. Prospect of "summit" talks has markedly raised Faure's prestige.
  - A. While Faure's own views on East-West relations fluctuate, he apparently accepts Mendes-France thesis (i.e., because German rearmament is matter of several years, a general arms reduction in the meantime could be applied to German forces).
  - B. Faure is supported by strongly nationalist elements, especially the Gaullists, whose neutralism is encouraged by USSR's action on Austria.
  - C. Other influential groups (including Daladier) have urged that Austrian precedent can also be applied to Germany--an idea supportable by large groups of Frenchmen unreconciled to an equal and rearmed Germany.

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**VI. Soviet moves have been accompanied by change in French Communist tactics, particularly evident in Duclos' open letter of 9 May.**

**A. Duclos called for "unity of action" with rank-and-file Socialists, with emphasis on preventing another war.**

**B. Embassy Paris, recalling instances of co-operation between the two (18 April cantonal elections), believes that a continuation of these Communist appeals would prove hard for Socialist rank-and-file to resist.**

**VII. Italy, preoccupied with presidential election and intra-cabinet tensions, has given comparatively little attention to recent Soviet moves.**

**A. Italian public opinion is such, however, that Soviet proposals will increase popular hopes for disarmament and easing of East-West tensions; they will stimulate neutralist sentiment, strengthen those groups which have consistently argued that Italy should stay on sidelines in event of war.**

**B. Increased public pressure can be expected for diversion of defense appropriations to socio-economic reform.**

**VIII. Allaying of public fears of Soviet aggression puts Henni Socialists in stronger position, should they offer Christian Democrat support in a new government (Scelba's continuance unlikely after 5 June elections).**

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A. Nenni has often stated he has no objection to NATO provided it remain a defensive alliance.

B. Thus, prospect for more left-of-center Italian government improved.

IX. In West Germany, in general, Soviet maneuvers on German unity since last January have prompted belief that Moscow is now more flexible in diplomatic tactics.

A. Moscow's newest tactics have buoyed German hopes for progress on unity.

B. West Germans now less disposed to believe Moscow solely at fault for continuing East-West difficulties.

E. As to "summit" meeting, Chancellor Adenauer has warned that, if the West is to ward off Soviet overtures on German neutrality, it should propose European-wide security system, including both Soviet bloc and NATO.

A. All political parties in Bonn presently advocate <sup>as</sup> establishment of European security system, /means of assuring Moscow of Germany's future peaceful intentions.

B. Adenauer has declared he would never pay price of neutrality for free all-German elections.

1. All other coalition parties except refugee's support this position.

2. Two state elections in past weeks have shown no increase in West German neutrality sentiment.

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C. Neither the actual signing of the Austrian treaty nor the 11 May disarmament statement caused a stir in unity-ridden West Germany.

XI. In Scandinavia, public opinion generally accepted that USSR's Austria gesture was made to influence West Germany.

A. Considerable sentiment favors a unified Germany free from military ties with either East or West.

B. Reaction in Norway and Denmark (both NATO members), guardedly optimistic about possibility of fruitful discussions on Germany, but suspicion of possible Soviet demands remains.

C. Finnish Prime Minister Kekkonen, known to be most apprehensive about possible consequences of West German rearmament on Soviet policy towards Finland, probably would greet German neutralization with relief.

D. Scandinavians generally regard Soviet disarmament proposals as a retreat from previous stubbornly-held position, and believe they include proposals which the West cannot refuse to discuss seriously.

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